

AN APPEAL FOR THE RIGHT.

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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BY

REV. A. L. BROOKS,

PASTOR OF THE THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO.

TEXT:

"RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION, BUT SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY
PEOPLE." Prov. xiv, 34.

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CHICAGO, July 14th, 1856.

REV. A. L. BROOKS.

DEAR SIR:—The undersigned, members of your Church and congregation, desire to express their approval of your sermon on the present condition of our country, delivered yesterday, in the forenoon, in the Third Presbyterian Church, and to request a copy of the same for publication.

We understand perfectly well, that the minister of the gospel has a higher and holier mission than to meddle with the ordinary politics of the country on *mere questions of policy*, or the strife among parties for emolument and place, and we rejoice that the question of *Tariff* or *Bank* and similar subjects, have never found admittance to the pulpit. But, when corrupt men, for party or political purposes, seek to overthrow the *great principles* on which the very pillars of our freedom rest, when freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of the pulpit to proclaim the gospel of Christ; when the constitution of our country is sought to be overthrown, and men are denied a passage from one section of the land to another; when the right to possess and bear arms is denied, and when in one territory of the country it is made a misdemeanor, a crime to express the sentiment of the Declaration of Independence "that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights"—when the great principles of *civil, political and religious liberty* are thus sought to be stricken down, we believe it the right, yea, the duty, of every Minister of the Gospel to proclaim aloud among the people the great principles of God's word in relation to these subjects. We believe it to be the appropriate business of the clergy to apply the truths and principles of the Bible to all the activities of man's nature, to all the duties he owes, not only to God, but to all his fellow men. In our opinion a crisis has arrived in the affairs of this country, which renders this duty imperative upon the clergymen of the land. Just prior to, and during the Revolution, the Christian ministers of the country did more than any other class of men in securing our national independence. With scarcely an exception, they proclaimed from the pulpit the teachings of God's word in regard to civil government. "Had they taken a different course," says an historian, "we might have borne the yoke of colonial

servitude to this very hour." We believe a similar crisis has now arrived, imperatively demanding a similar course on the part of the clergy; at such a time the watchman should give the trumpet *no uncertain* sound.

Heartily approving your course, and the sentiments of the sermon, we respectfully ask a copy for publication.

H. F. MATHER,	LIVI B. TAFT,	H. WITBECK.
NATHANIEL NORTON,	JOSIAH H. BROSS,	NELSON MASON,
S. N. WILCOX,	C. C. FISHER,	W. H. HUNT.
H. VAN DER KOLK,	W. H. HAIGHT,	E. M. GOODRICH,
S. LIND,	D. W. SMITH.	WM. OSBORN,
H. H. YATES,	J. JOHNSON,	H. F. PALMER,
G. H. HAZELTON,	D. J. LAKE,	S. B. JAMES.

CHICAGO, July 19th, 1856.

MESSRS. LIND, MATHER, TAFT, WITBECK, AND OTHERS.

DEAR FRIENDS:—Your request for a copy of my sermon on the present crisis in the affairs of our country, is received. It gives me pleasure that the sentiments of my sermon meet your approbation.

It was preached, as you are aware, in accordance with the expressed desire of my session, and I can hardly feel at liberty to withhold it from publication, since now they, with others, have expressed the desire to publish it.

In consenting to its publication, I trust to your judgment as to its probable utility. As a sermon I know it is open to criticism, but as an appeal for the right, it may possibly serve in some small measure the great cause for which it was prepared.

With much esteem, and many prayers for the success of the right,

I am truly Yours,

ASAHEL L. BROOKS.

AN APPEAL FOR THE RIGHT.

“RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION, BUT SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY PEOPLE.”—*Prov. xiv. 34.*

This text contains an independent proposition. It is not limited in its meaning by its context, or by any peculiar necessity of interpretation; it may be applied in its exact signification, and in its most extended adaptation. It asserts the true basis of national exaltation, as conceived by the great king, to whom God had given special and unexampled wisdom. It brings before our minds, at this time, a great truth, of the most vital concern to our future prosperity and safety as a people. We are in the midst of a great national excitement. The public mind is agitated as it has been at no period since the great Revolution. The public heart beats with a fever more intense and pervading than has throbbed in the veins of the nation since the declaration of independence. This intense agitation is not merely a strife for political ascendancy and power, not merely an effort to secure national revenue and credit, not the fear of, and preparation for a foreign war; but it is the great, the vital, the transcendent concern of our national preservation; of the supremacy of *immutable and external right*, or of the *most atrocious and unparalleled wrong*. All mere party questions have passed entirely out of the contest. It is not a question of national bank or a sub-treasury, of a high tariff or a low tariff, of whiggery or democracy, but a struggle to preserve our national liberty, our national character, the freedom of the press and of the pulpit, the freedom of conscience and liberty of opinion, the safety of our

personal rights and property. The question before the people of this country to-day, is a *great national* question. We spurn all attempt of the tyrant oppressor to caricature it as sectional ambition, as abolitionism. We claim that with the decision of this question which *now agitates* the people will be settled the future character and destiny of this nation. Hence the vast and overwhelming concern that is involved in our just apprehension of the nation's only basis of prosperity and safety. We readily admit that it is possible to preserve a national *existence* under a dominion of tyrannous injustice and oppression. We concede the possibility of a national wealth and power, as the fruit of wrong. But, we must deny to any nation an essential exaltation, a reasonable hope of *perpetual power*, whose resources are acquired by injustice and sin. It is *right* alone that stands immutable, amid the convulsions and revolutions of time. Right may be overcome for the present; wrong may wrest the scepter from the hand of sovereign and eternal truth; but as certainly as the laws of this universe are eternally just, immutable and right, so certainly will the dominion of wrong be brought to an end. All wrong is necessarily finite and subject; to admit its possible perpetuity, would be to deny the first great principle of human development, indeed, of all government; it would resolve society into the chaotic confusion of an abject atheism. All wrong, in its dominion, must necessarily bring ruin to everything under its power. This must be as inevitable, as that immutable and eternal right must ultimately prevail. This is the great fact, that as an eternal principle, an everlasting rock must underlie all authority, all legitimate power. Every attempt to build authority or establish institutions upon another foundation, must reveal the folly of building on the sand. It is (with all reverence we utter it) upon this absolute and eternal right alone, that the throne of God himself can stand. It is the security to Him, and to the innumerable creatures of heaven and earth, that His

perfections forever exclude the possibility of wrong in Him. Were it possible for God to do a wrong, then it would be certain that there is no immutable and eternal right, no security whatever, against the irretrievable wreck of the moral universe. Then all ground for judgment for rewards and punishments would be taken away; all government would be but the mere tyranny of a physical force. Nor are these facts mere theological necessities; the great principle of right as the umpire of all appeal, is supreme in politics as well as religion; in human government as well as divine. It pervades and is sovereign in every relation of life; it is the divine, the eternal umpire in every decision of human affairs. It can be set aside for the realization of no interest for time or eternity, but by violence and wrong. And since now, as a great nation, we are in the midst of the most intense and important struggle that has ever enlisted our hearts and minds, since the great Revolution, it becomes us to plant ourselves in earnest upon that abiding principle, for the enjoyment of which we enlisted in the struggle with the enraged powers of the British throne. Our national territory is now the battle ground, where our national institutions, our civil liberty, our personal freedom, the freedom of the press and of the pulpit, our liberty of conscience and of settlement, our national honor and perpetuity, are pitted against slavery, white and black, against tyranny, unmitigated by the slightest necessity, the supremacy of brute force, lawlessness, governmental duplicity, partiality, cowardice, robbery, arson, murder, and every abhorrent vice that follows the lead of the usurper, the banditti and the assassin. It is the battle between the power of a local and limited despotism, and a universal liberty of life and the pursuit of happiness. It is the question whether what may seem to be the momentary interest of *six* millions of the people, shall be exalted over every sacred right and interest of *thirteen* millions of the same people; whether slavery, with its gorgon head, shall sit in

state to sway the destiny of this great nation, or whether liberty with its God-like attributes shall hold the empire. The West, around which, with universal harmony the nation had set the defence of an irrefragible compact of liberty, is very soon to be the heart of this great republic. It will produce the wealth, and hold the people that will control the destiny of the nation. Yet, with the unbridled violence of despotism, slavery has broken through this sacred defence of the territory. She has made wide the breach and turned her brutal hordes upon it to possess the land. To make sure her power in all ages to come, she has determined to establish her oppressions there; she is resolved at all hazard to hold this geographical centre of the nation under her command, and we must concede that her success in this great struggle will be the triumph of treason and destruction to our national honor. Give to slavery the territories of the West and she is crowned sovereign of the American nation, to hold the sceptre until God's eternal providence shall blot us from the record of the nations; or until rotten with our moral and social corruption, we shall become the bane and the disgust of the world. The great question of this supremacy is *now* to be settled; the strife is now raging; slavery has arisen with all her strength, with all her stratagem, with all her treachery; she knows this is her last great battle; she has thrown herself into it with the phrenzy and madness of desperation; she has sacrificed every sentiment of national honor; she has thrown aside every care for national rights and liberty; she has cut loose from every obligation to the republic; she has plotted with the darkest treason that ever found birth in the midnight councils of the traitor; she has involved herself in the most open, high-handed, and daring assault upon the liberties for which our fathers fought so bravely, and which God gave them so freely; she has resolved herself into an invading army, employing the banditti, the ruffian rangers, the highway robbers, and the organized

assassins to put to death the honest settler, to destroy the ballot box, to pillage the settlement, to harrass the immigrant, and by all violent means to secure to herself the triumph of her bloody sceptre over free and christian America.

That the whole system of Slavery, as maintained in these United States, is a giant wrong, unparalleled by anything in human history, I shall not stop now to prove. That it is a sin, which in its prevalence must as inevitably destroy any nation under heaven, as God is immutably and eternally just, I need not delay to demonstrate. Its character, both moral and political, is too thoroughly established in every christian community to need a revelation.

And now we go to God for council in this fearful peril, and he assures us that it is "*righteousness that exalteth a nation,*" that "sin is a reproach to any people." From Him we learn that no government can finally stand, which is not established upon immutable and eternal right. Here then is the grand necessity for the people of this nation, *to secure the establishment and dominion of the right.* This is righteousness, a conformity of heart and life to the eternal right. In religion, it is a conformity of faith and practice to the divine law, which is the sovereign right. In politics, it is a conformity of the heart and life to the unchangable rights of the social relation—I mean those high and absolute relations of life, not those which have been imposed by tyranny and sin. That such a conformity is essential to and must accomplish a nation's exaltation, is apparent in the fact, that whatever is right, *stands*, immutable and sublime. Every right action, every right authority, commends itself directly to the approbation and favor of the Sovereign and Eternal Judge. This remark is limited of course by the intention of the heart in the act or expression of authority; for while the character of the act or of the authority may not be affected in the least, the approbation and reward of the Sovereign is still contingent upon the state of heart that prompts it. But as the

general principle, all right actions and right authority commend themselves to the *favor* of the Infinite Sovereign. And as *nations* as well as individuals must go before the Infinite Sovereign for their approval and reward, their safety and prosperity must depend upon their conformity to His immutable law of right. It is a great and most serious fact, that every nation under heaven is responsible to God, has a mission to perform, a character to sustain, and a judgment to meet. There is no more serious atheism in the world than this national atheism, which declares that the nations have no God, no accountability. The declaration of the holy scriptures is, that "*THE NATION and kingdom, that will not serve Thee, shall perish; yea, those NATIONS shall be utterly wasted.*" There must be therefore righteousness in the nation as well as in the individual, before she can enjoy the Sovereign's favor and promotion; before she can experience that *exaltation* which the God of Nations only can impart. If it is a dishonor to the individual, if it is the precursor of his ultimate ruin that he is unjust, oppressive, dishonest, violent, insists upon his will, however corrupt, at whatever cost, then it must be equally a dishonor, and the harbinger of ultimate ruin to a nation, to possess the same character. If justice and right are immutable and must destroy the guilty individual, then the same immutable justice and right must destroy the guilty nation.

But it must be noticed now, that the nations must receive their rewards and their punishments *in time*. They cannot go, in their corporate capacity, into the eternal world neither for approval or condemnation. There are no individual nations in Heaven or Hell. Hence that justice and right may preserve their immutable and eternal dominion, the nations must have their judgments *in time*; and those judgments moreover must be administered in such rewards and punishments as shall be *impartially just*. If God is no respecter of persons, no more can He be of nations. His impartiality must forever protect the weak

and ignorant nations from the judgments that fall upon the sins of the powerful and the favored nations. And so we find that unbelief in the Jewish nation was a sin of far greater magnitude than in the pagan nations around them; and hence it is, that to this day the Jewish nation are suffering a punishment which God has never inflicted upon any other nation on the earth. They were the chosen people of God. He had distinguished them from all the other nations, by His special, most peculiar and exalted blessing upon them; and hence their unexampled punishment. And so we must frame our expectations for our great American Nation. God in His eternal justice sits Sovereign over us, as well as over the nations of the past. He demands of us a national character in keeping with the great privileges He has bestowed upon us. We have had our national peculiarities, our Providential appointments, as marked and distinguishing as the ancient covenant people of God. Before the nations of the earth, although we are but in our infancy compared with some of them, we have held a very peculiar position. We have been for the study and the wonder of the world. Our institutions are peculiar; they are happy beyond comparison in their conception and practical working. Our social, political and religious freedom, have been the envy of the nations. Our wealth of every kind; our soil, our forests, our mines, our commerce, have no parallel in the civilized world. And now we ask, shall the Jewish nation wear the curse of immutable and everlasting righteousness for her *unbelief* alone? Shall she suffer her imprisonment from every national privilege, hear the reproach and bear the scorn of the undivided world, because she betrayed and put to death her Messiah? Shall the nation of the cruel Pharaoh be silent when God sends upon them the plagues that strike us dumb with horror to enumerate, and be led unresisting to the instantaneous overthrow of her hosts, *because she would not let the captive Israel go free*? Shall the mighty republics of the past be swept with the besom of destruction, preserving but here

and there a sad memento of their imperial splendor, *because they knew not and feared not God?* and our own free heaven distinguished and exalted nation know no judgment, meet no sovereign authority, no righteous condemnation, from an almighty and avenging God for our sins? Can we innocently and with impunity install the most unnatural and monstrous oppression, the most corrupt and soul destroying slavery, the most brutal violence against the liberty of settlement, liberty of opinion, liberty of speech, liberty of conscience, into the sovereignty over us? Can we innocently throw down every sacred political right, every solemn duty to our fellow men, every holy obligation to God, before this giant usurpation and wrong? Do we fully realize that with the enthroning of slavery over the land we utterly subordinate the gospel of our Lord and Saviour, and deprive ourselves of the power to perform the great commands of our supreme authority, to go and preach the gospel to every nation? Let slavery have the reign in our government, and she will unite Church and State, and take the control of the christian pulpit in an hour. And will a Righteous and Almighty Sovereign suffer the defeat of every purpose for the peculiar appointments which He has bestowed upon this great republic, by the usurpation and damning treason of the slave power. Will He employ His providence and His grace to carry forward this nation to perpetual honor and prosperity, under the leadership and in passive submission to the dictation of the most perfidious tyranny this side perdition? Will He exalt (and all exaltation comes from God) the nation that rebels against His immutable and eternal sovereignty, that strikes from His hand the sceptre of His dominion over the millions of the enslaved, that usurps the destiny of the soul, that attempts to forestall His providence, that defies His judgment and scorns the teachings of His word, that imprisons His ambassadors for performing His commissions, that offers them indignities which savage violence could never have framed for her vanquished foes? Will He bend the energies of His throne, the proprieties

of His immutable perfections, to the servile, selfish, irrational and abhorrent purposes of this monster iniquity? Is the Lord God Almighty so tame, so weak a sovereign that He seeks a partnership with the prince of the slave power, with his blood-hounds, his chains, his slave drivers, his senatorial and brutal bullies, his murderous gang of lawless and midnight assassins, his inquisitorial banditti and governmental accomplices, to perfect His providences for the great American Republic? O monstrous cupidity and blindness, that can be for one moment betrayed into the impression that an Almighty and Infinitely Righteous God will suffer this great nation to escape His judgments, His justly portioned punishments, while she persists in her treason against His every claim of authority and love. And how more than insane is the idea of some of the christian public that God will wink at the indifference of His own Church to these overwhelming anxieties of the present crisis. We believe that God has intended vastly more than the simple establishment of civil liberty by the founding of the American Republic. He has ultimate aims for the prevalence and power of His kingdom on earth in all the peculiar appointments of His providence for us, as He had in the choice of the ancient nation of Israel. And for our unbelief and apostacy from these great interests of civil liberty, as well as religious freedom, He may consign us to a worse than Egyptian slavery and destruction. God will have His glory from a Church which He has placed in such circumstances as surround the American Church to-day. If she does not come to the rescue of the land from the grasp of oppression; if she does not employ her every power to push back the invader of her sacred altars and liberty, then she must receive and wear the curse of Meroz *"because she comes not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."* With the ascendancy of the slave power, which must be the result of surrendering our national territories to her control, we shall necessarily suffer the submission of the Christian Church. It is preposterous to suppose that

the kingdom of Christ will maintain its supremacy and power, where slavery and oppression hold the empire. Wherever slavery exists now, the Kingdom of Christ is subordinate to it; her ambassadors are restrained in their liberty; they cannot declare the whole council of God; they cannot preach the gospel to every creature as they are enjoined; they are commissioned to set forth the Kingdom of Christ, to "*proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof*," to set forth the supreme obligations of the creature to the Great Creator. But the laws of slavery forbid these ambassadors of Christ's kingdom to teach the millions of the oppressed, except under the espionage of the most abhorrent tyranny, any portion of the divine requirement. Slavery imprisons and expatriates, and would put to death the ambassador of Christ that shows to a slave any higher duty than a servile submission to his master, that opens to his mind the relations he sustains to God and his fellow creatures, that shows him Christ breaking down all walls of separation and bestowing equal liberties and privileges upon the undistinguished race, upon the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the bond and the free. Slavery by legal constitution tramples upon the most sacred institutions of the creator for our race; and if we suffer its power to triumph, as we most certainly shall, if the present designs of slavery are accomplished, then we must take to ourselves all the fearful consequences which shall result to the Kingdom of Christ. Slavery is the same everywhere and under all circumstances. With the same power over the United States which she now has over South Carolina, she would exercise the same authority and perpetrate the same atrocities in her extended dominion that she now does in her limited empire. If she succeeds in the present struggle, there can be no effectual barrier to the accomplishment of the bold threat of the southern desperado, that "*he will yet call the roll of his slaves under the monument on Bunker Hill*." If we tamely submit to the iniquitous

schemes that are now unblushingly published to the world, as the settled policy of the slave power, there can be no obstacle to the accomplishment of this crime against the dead and the living; this demonical mockery of the providence of God, and treason against the Kingdom of Christ. Slavery has but to decide in the United States Congress what she has decided in her State Legislatures, that *slaves are property*, and the door is open for slavery in Massachusetts and Illinois. What force can constitutional objections have under the dominion of such men as are now leading in the strife for slavery. If government can enforce the laws of a legislature elected by a foreign and invading banditti, and meet all the expenses of irresponsible ruffian hordes and lawless mobs in their murderous assault upon the peaceable settlement, from the public treasury, while as yet she is held in check by the power of the people's representatives; what can she not do when submitted to the unrestrained violence of the propagandists. Congress would be just as great a tyrant as the Legislature of South Carolina, with no greater power to resist. And in what could the condition of the people differ, with the power in Congress which the immense territories of the West would give to slavery, from the people of South Carolina? The same power that spent its impotent rage upon the "three thousand" ministers of New England, a short time since, would be no longer impotent; and the same spirit maddened by its former weakness would rage in four fold fury upon the faithful ambassador for Christ. This judgment is made up from a candid survey of the precedents of slavery with the help of its revealed moral and political nature. It can no more be trusted with power in the republic than on the plantation. It is the same in Congress that it is in the cotton field. It carries the same bludgeons in the one place as the other. It lays them as brutally upon the head of the great statesman on the floor of the senate for his opinions as upon the back of the toiling and overburdened

woman of the plantation, for her failure in the task. It is fiendish, infernal in its nature and its practice; and to suffer its installation into the supremacy of the republic, is no less than to surrender the Kingdom of the meek and lowly Jesus to its infidel and abandoned dominion. This is the great struggle that must now command the minds and the hearts of the people. It has an overwhelming concern to every servant of God, to every follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, to every lover of his country, to every lover of freedom. The fearful determination has been openly expressed, that the advocates of liberty and right *shall be subdued*, that slavery shall wield the power and hold the destiny of this great nation.

We appeal, therefore, to every christian man, to every unapostatized decendant of the fathers of the revolution, to every man in whom one spark of patriotism is left, to kindle the fires of hatred to tyrants; now to rouse you from your indifference, from your dreaming security, and in the fear and love of God and truth, in a holy regard for the imperishable right, in obedience to your solemn covenant obligations to your dear Redeemer, in patriotic devotion to the liberties of your country, consecrate all your powers to the mighty struggle in which we are involved. To every sacred right and privilege of freemen, to the most vital and sacred liberties of our common christianity; the issue will be victory or death.

The method of our effort in this struggle must be controlled by the declaration of the text, that "*righteousness exalteth a nation.*" We need but to resolutely stand to the right; right is all powerful. We feel no necessity to advocate violence and war; the slumbering conscience of the people is sufficient, when awakened, to hold the tyrant in check. We need no stratagem, no intrigue, no political financiering; we have in our hands, at least in the principal portion of our land, the potent instrument with which to maintain our righteousness *in the right way*; we need no

military ordinance at present, no governmental patronage; the executive and the giant wrong are alike vulnerable to the power of the "ballot box;" it is the only artillery a freeman needs to defend his sacred rights; load it well with freemen's ballots, and its booming thunder will shake the last fortress of slavery from its foundations, and wake the glorious echo in the shouts of the civilized world. I know there is a holy horror in many minds of the introduction of the ballot box into the christian pulpit, but I bring it here to-day, as the venerable servants of Christ took the cannon, the musket, and the sword into the pulpit, in the latter half of the last century. It was the cause of liberty, of freedom to enjoy their personal rights, that made the pulpits of Boston and Philadelphia so earnest, so decided, so peremptory in their teachings in the days of the revolution. But a *more mighty oppression* has forged its fetters and *opened the war*, by which it swears it will bind them on us. I point now to the ballot box as the all potent instrument which Divine Providence has put in our hands, with which to defend the rights and preserve the liberties of the State and of the Christian Church. I challenge every member of Christ's kingdom, in this land, to take it as the heaven designated weapon, with which to defend her sacred altars in this peril. As an ambassador for Christ, I should feel myself recreant to my sacred trust, were I to keep silence amid the perils which I see impending over us. It is the solemn and imperious *duty*, as we conceive it, of the ministry of Christ, to cry aloud, to point the Church to the ballot box as the rightful and adequate instrumentality with which to beat back the usurper. Let every servant of Christ spurn the infidel taunt of "*political preaching*," and answer the appeals of Christ's kingdom with the faithful and powerful dispensations of the word of God. We repeat what was said at the outset; there is no simply political question involved in this contest; it is the one grand and only question of the supremacy and nationalization of liberty

or slavery. The civilized world is looking upon the struggle with mingled amazement and horror. The hosts of heaven are looking with sorrowful astonishment into the arena, amazed that after such experience as we have suffered and enjoyed, we should now be found drawn again into the fearful conflict, by the cupidity and remorseless guilt of a portion of our own confederacy. I appeal in the name of all righteousness, in the name of all patriotism, in the fear of my God and the love of my country, to the christian patriot to carry the freeman's ballot to the freeman's altar, and deposit there, amid the incense of fervent prayer to God to save the nation from the grasp of the tyrant oppressor. Then shall we preserve our national exaltation, the peculiar distinction which has made us the most observed of the nations; then shall we hold inviolate the sacred trust which the Almighty God imposed upon us, and carry to the future generations the liberties which were purchased for us with the treasure and the blood of our fathers. May God inspire us with the disposition, and impress upon us the duty *to maintain the right*, for His Son's sake, amen.